NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5977 JULY 10, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

MALDIVES ATMOSPHERICS

ANNCR:

PROFOUND POLITICAL CHANGES ARE IN THE MAKING IN THE MALDIVES, AN ISLAND NATION LOCATED IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, SOUTHWEST OF INDIA. VOA CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN RECENTLY VISITED THE MALDIVES, AND HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE CHANGES WERE SET IN MOTION BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT EARLIER THIS MONTH THAT PRESIDENT IBRIHIM NASIR, THE MAN WHO HAS HELD ELECTIVE POWER IN THE COUNTRY SINCE NINETEEN FIFTY-SEVEN, HAD DECLINED TO BE NOMINATED FOR A NEW FIVE-YEAR TERM. IN DECLINING THE NOMINATION, THE FIFTY-TWO YEAR OLD CHIEF EXECUTIVE TOLD THE CITIZENS MAJLIS, THE MALDIVIAN PARLIAMENT, THAT BECAUSE OF HEALTH AND CERTAIN OTHER REASONS WHICH HE DID NOT ENUMERATE, HE FOUND IT HARD TO ACCEPT ANOTHER TERM.

PRESIDENT NASIR'S SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT CREATED SO MUCH SHOCK AMONG LEGISLATORS THAT THE SESSION HAD TO BE RECESSED WITHOUT COMPLETING OTHER SCHEDULED BUSINESS. A FEW DAYS LATER, THE MAJLIS MET IN SPECIAL SESSION AND NOMINATED THE PRESENT TRANSPORT MINISTER, MAUMOON ABDUL GAYOON TO BE THE NEW PRESIDENT.

(OPT) ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT NASIR IS KNOWN TO HAVE LOST ONE KIDNEY DUE TO KIDNEY DISEASE, MANY MALDIVIANS ARE INCLINED TO DOUBT THAT HEALTH WAS THE MAIN REASON, AND THERE HAS BEEN MUCH SPECULATION ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE OTHER REASONS REFERRED TO BY THE PRESIDENT IN HIS ADDRESS TO THE MAJLIS. ONE THEORY BEING ADVANCED IS THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY UNHAPPY AT THE PERFORMANCE OF MANY CURRENT OFFICEHOLDERS, SOME OF THEM

RELATIVES OR IN-LAWS, AND FELT THE BEST WAY TO CLEAN HOUSE WAS TO STEP DOWN FROM POWER. (END OPT)

MISTER NASIR WAS APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER UNDER SULTAN MOHAMMED FARID, IN DECEMBER NINETEEN FIFTY-SEVEN. THE SULTAN QUICKLY BECAME ONLY A FIGUREHEAD, AS MISTER NASIR'S POWER STEADILY INCREASED. WHEN A REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION WAS ADOPTED IN NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT, MISTER NASIR WAS NAMED PRESIDENT. OVER THE YEARS HIS POWERS HAVE BECOME NEARLY ABSOLUTE, SINCE PARLIAMENT HAS BEEN LITTLE MORE THAN A RUBBER STAMP.

WHILE PRESIDENT NASIR HAS USED HIS POWER TO FORCE THE PACE OF MODERNIZATION IN THE MALDIVES, THERE HAVE BEEN INDICATIONS HE HAS BECOME WEARY WITH HAVING TO MAKE NEARLY ALL DECISIONS, LARGE AND SMALL. RECENTLY, ACCORDING TO MALDIVIAN SOURCES, HE STOPPED THE PRACTICE OF SIGNALING THE MAJLIS AS TO WHAT LAWS HE WANTED PASSED, AND WHICH HE DIDN'T. AS A RESULT, A NUMBER OF NEEDED LEGISLATIVE CHANGES, FAILED TO WIN APPROVAL.

MANY MALDIVIANS APPEAR WORRIED ABOUT THE POWER VACUUM MISTER NASIR'S DEPARTURE FROM POLITICS COULD CREATE. OTHERS ARE FEARFUL OF LOSING POSITIONS OF PRIVILEGE IN THE POWER STRUGGLE THEY BELIEVE COULD DEVELOP. FOR THAT REASON, MANY MALDIVIANS ARE STILL HOPING THE PRESIDENT WILL RECONSIDER HIS DECISION.

JS/RCS